**Below are two sample DBQ essays that demonstrate many of the attributes of strong, persuasive thesis-driven historical essays.**

**Essay Question:** *“What were the causes of the farmers’ plight in the late 19th century, and how did the farmers propose to solve those problems?”*

American society of the early nineteenth century has been characterized by the flourishing of farming and country life. During its early history and well into the 1800s, America remained largely a land of farms and small country towns, but with the arrival of industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteen century came a significant change in rural America. Farm life for many Americans during this period became frustrating and harsh, as small farmers attempted to compete in the newly industrialized society. Farmers couldn’t seek aid from the federal government due to the prevailing lassiez-faire attitude, which prevented the government from regulate business. *It is clear that the plight of farmers in the late nineteenth century was caused by the unfair practices of railroads along with the dropping prices of crop sand problems regarding currency. Farmers proposed to resolve these problems by advocating for the silver standard and through the organization of groups such as the Populist Party in order to protect their interests. By coming together farmers were able to overcome the prejudices fade by railroads and they’re able to propose a solution to the urgency issues.*

**Topic Sentence:** The plight of farmers in the late nineteenth century was caused, in part, by the unfair practices of railroads along with the falling prices of crops. Increased American agricultural production and competition from countries throughout the world caused the falling process of crops such as wheat and cotton. As prices of crops fell, farmers in debt felt the need to growth more crops in order to pay off debts, exacerbating the problem of over production and further decreases in crop prices (Doc. 3). For example, in 1886 America was producing 200 million bushels of wheat at two dollars per bushel, but in 1895 about 550 million bushels of wheat were produced at only fifty cents a bushel (Doc. 5). The decrease in the value of crops prevented farmers from paying off their never-ending debts, resulting in foreclosures by banks and many farmers were forced to become sharecroppers. Other problems that farmers faced included the discriminatory and unfair practices of industrial corporations such as railroads. Railroads and warehouses often favored larger farmers and, therefore, charged them lower transportation rates than smaller farmers. Railroads usually charged small farmers more for storage and shipment of crops, and they also created pools and trusts in order to fix prices and divide businesses for even greater profits. Many people felt that they would “get permanent relief only when the government owns the railroads” (Doc. 6). Therefore, efforts to solve the problems of farmers were initiated with the organization of the National Grange and other such groups. The Grange movement focused on defending farmers from trusts, pools and the rates charged by railroads. The Grangers even succeeded in proving that the government could regulate businesses of public interest such as railroads through cases like *Munn v. Illinois (1877)*. The success of state regulation of commerce was short-lived due to ruling in the case of *Wabash v. Illinois (1886)*, which ruled that that state couldn’t regulate *interstate* commerce, therefore pressuring federal government to pass the Interstate Commerce Act. The interstate Commerce Commission created by the ICA investigated and prosecuted rebates and regulated interstate commerce. Other Farmers’ Alliances followed the example set by the Grangers and joined together farmers in attempts to overcome the oppressing influence of industrialization. It is clear that farmers proposed to solve the problems that faced them (regarding railroads and the prices of crops) through the formation of groups such as the Grangers.

**Topic Sentence:** Other causes of the plight of farmers were issues regarding currency. Many farmers were in debt in the late nineteenth century due to the fact that they had borrowed money to buy land and machinery in an attempt to produce more crops and make larger profits. As discussed in the previous paragraph, this caused the decrease of crop prices, therefore providing insufficient profits for farmers. Farmers were then stuck with figuring out a way to pay off their debts to the “money-lenders of the East” (Doc. 2). The solution to this problem seemed to be to have more money in circulation. Farmers wanted more money in circulation, because it could enable them to pay off their loans easily with inflated dollars. One way to put more money in circulation was to print more paper money, “soft money”, as advocated by members of the Greenback Party. Others, such as members of the Populist Party, demanded free and unlimited coining of silver (Dc. 1). Farmers wanted money to be backed by silver because gold was more finite/rate, so money back by gold could not be as abundant as money backed by silver. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 increased the coinage of silver to more than two million to four million dollars of silver coined per month under the Bland-Allison Act, which was passed as a result of the Crime of ’73, when Congress stopped the coining of silver. Farmers believed that the only solution to their problems regarding currency and their debts was to come up with a way to put more money in circulation. Therefore they fought for the increased coinage of silver and the decreased reaction of silver to gold (which was typically 16 to 1).

It is clear that the plight of farmers in the late nineteenth century was caused by unfair railroad practices and the decreasing prices of crops along with problem regarding currency. Farms during this time period were faced with the struggle to keep up with their growing society. Small farmers tried to compete with larger fares by buying expensive machinery and planting more crops, causing them to become in deb.t they were then faxed with problem of manipulation currency so that they could easily pay off these debts. The farmers were abler to propose solutions to their problems through the organization of the Grace Movement, Populist Party, Greenback Party, and advocating the silver standard. Farmers of the late nineteenth century were surely faxed with several problems, but they found several ways to help themselves.

**Essay Question:** *“What led the southern states to secede from the Union in 1860 and 1861?”*

    While the Civil War was triggered by many different causes, the main ones all branched from Northern anti-slavery feelings. *The main causes that urged the Southern states to secede were Western expansion and its consequences, growing sectional differences between north and south, and finally, as the “last straw” for Southern secession, the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860.*    **Topic Sentence:** Western expansion and manifest destiny caused problems for both north and south, mainly in answering the question, “what states should slavery have in the territories acquired in the west?” Up until 1850, the balance between slave and free states in Congress was leaving both sides temporarily happy. Then, when California, populated by the gold rush, applied for statehood as a free state, the balance was challenged when the Southerners raised a clamor over the tipping of the balance to the north (Doc 5). The Compromise of 1850 was then made by the great compromisers, including Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. The Compromise provided for the admission of California as a free state, the outlawing of the slave trade in the capital, and allowing the New Mexico and Utah territories to decide the fate of slavery by popular sovereignty. It also introduced a very strict fugitive slave law, which extremely angered the North and turned more Northerners into abolitionists. Since the Northerners had gotten the “better deal” in the Compromise, the Southerners were angry at the North, part of which refused to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. This created even more North vs. South hostility. In 1854, the issue with Western expansion arose once again with Douglas, who overthrew the cherished Missouri Compromise by allowing Kansas and Nebraska to decide the status of slavery with popular sovereignty. The Northerners were outraged at this, and many abolitionists went to Kansas, which had become slave, leading to endless conflicts between the two sides, which served as a prelude to the Civil War, the fighting in “Bleeding Kansas”.

    **Topic Sentence:** Another reason the Southern states seceded was sectional differences between the South and the North. The largest consequence of these sectional differences was the splitting of the Democratic Party. President Buchanan was mostly at fault for this when he supported Kansas’s Lecompton Constitution, a tricky document which ensured that Kansas slave-owners would be protected no matter what. While this pleased Southern Democrats, Northern Democrats frowned upon the President’s endorsement of this unjust document, thus splitting the party in two, Southern and Northern. John Brown’s abolitionist raid on Harper’s Ferry, which ended in the death of many innocent people, also sharpened sectional hostility. It led Southerners to believe all Northern abolitionists were like Brown, while the North revered him as a martyr for the abolitionist cause. To the South, the raid symbolized the North forcing its abolitionist ways on them, making them even more likely to secede (Doc 2). Another example of sectional conflict arose with the *Dred Scott* case. In the case the Supreme Court, staffed mostly with pro-slavery Southerners, ruled that since Dred Scott was a slave, he was not a citizen, but property of his white master and his master’s rights cannot be interfered with. This was later adopted as part of the Southern Democratic Party platform (Doc 1). They also undermined the idea of popular sovereignty by saying that government could not interfere with slavery. Not only did this dangerously challenge the Missouri Compromise, which Northerners hold very dear, but also it helped to split the Democratic Party. The Northern half frowned upon the Supreme Court ruling, while the Southern half embraced it. At that point, the Southerners felt that a “geographical line” had been drawn across the nation, pitting North antislaveryites vs. South proslaveryites (Doc 6).

    **Topic Sentence:** The final straw for the South was the election of Abraham Lincoln. The Democratic Party, after failing to have a single, unified convention, nominated two candidates: Douglas, who got support from the North, and Breckinridge, who won support from the South. With the addition of the middle-of-the-road Constitutional Union Party candidate, Bell, the Republicans were able to win the election in 1860. The third party and the splitting of the Democratic Party allowed Lincoln to win without a majority of the popular vote, meaning more people opposed him than supported him. Lincoln won virtually no votes at all in the South (Doc 4) demonstrating their contempt for Lincoln, who was not an abolitionists in 1860, but he was the most anti-slavery expansion candidate the nation had seen up to that point. While the Republican Party platform did not advocate abolition, they supported containing slavery and not allowing it to spread (Doc 1). But even this was too much for South Carolina which seceded almost immediately after Lincoln’s election. It would soon be followed by many other Southern states.

    The Civil War had many causes, long-term and short-term. However, the main reasons the Southern states seceded was Western expansion and slavery controversy it brought up, the growing sectional differences between North and South and the sectionalist slavery conflict, and finally, Lincoln’s election in 1860 most directly led the Southern states to secede and led to the outbreak of the Civil War.